Lal Ded (or, Lalleshwari)..14th-century Kashmiri Mystic-poet and Saint

Lalleshwari - the mystic poetess, Saint of 14 th century Kashmir was an enigmatic, wandering, avadhuta like saint, who had immense influence on Shaivite philosophy. Her "vakhs" (sayings), passed on orally, were famous and they say that she influenced the Kashmiri language. Hence, my interest in compiling this short info about her…
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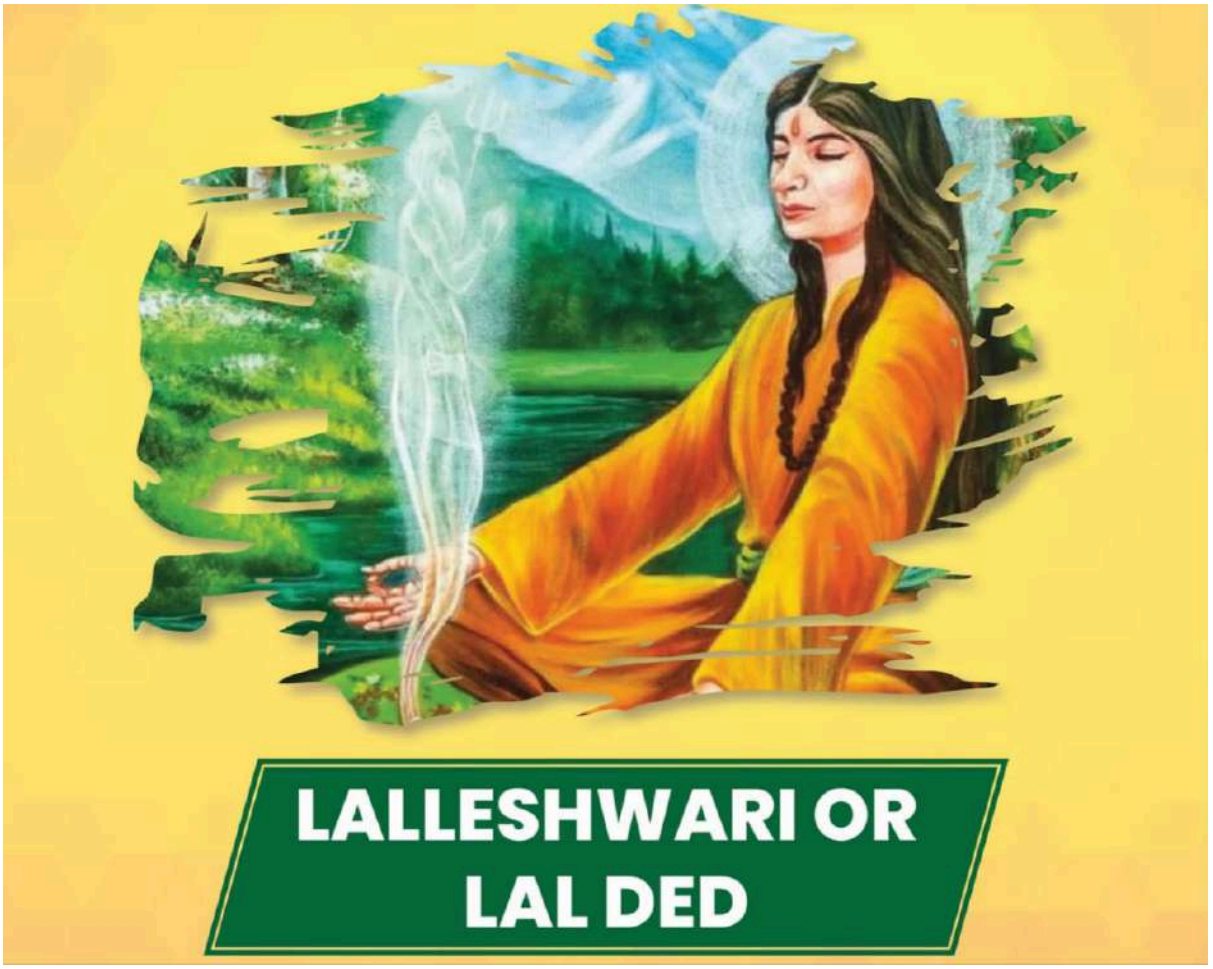

AI Overview

Lal Ded (1320–1392), or Lalleshwari, was a pioneering 14th-century Kashmiri mystic-poet and saint who founded Kashmiri literature through her "Vakhs" (four-line verses). A devotee of Lord Shiva, she practiced Shaivite mysticism, breaking social, religious, and gender norms by wandering as a mendicant, preaching divine oneness, and influencing both Hindus and Muslims.

Life and Context

- **Birth:** Born near Srinagar, Kashmir, into a Pandit family.
- **Early Life:** Married early, she reportedly suffered at the hands of her in-laws, leading to her renunciation of traditional life to become a wandering ascetic.
- **Philosophy:** Her poetry focused on the intense personal experience of God, rejecting idolatry and external rituals in favor of inner devotion.
- **Names:** Known as Lalla, Lalleshwari, Lal Dyad, Lalla Aarifa, and Lalishri.

The Vakhs (Verses)

- Lal Ded's poetry, known as *Lal Vakhs*, are profound, four-line aphorisms that laid the foundation for Kashmiri language and literature.
- They advocate for a spiritual, universal approach that transcends religious boundaries, bridging Kashmir Shaivism with Islamic Sufism.
- Her work highlights the absurdity of blind ritualism and emphasizes self-realization.

Legacy and Influence

- **Cultural Icon:** She is revered by both Hindus and Muslims, a central figure in Kashmiri syncretic culture.
- **Rebellious Saint:** She is often called a "rebel poet" for criticizing orthodox societal norms and religious hypocrisy.
- **Predecessor:** She preceded other medieval saints like Kabir, impacting the Bhakti movement.

She is a seminal figure whose verses still echo in Kashmir, promoting peace and spiritual tolerance.

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Ref: Wikipedia

Lalleshwari

Lalleshwari, (c. 1320–1392) also commonly known as **Lal Ded** (Kashmiri pronunciation: [laːl dˌad]), was a Kashmiri mystic of the Kashmir Shaivism school of Hindu philosophy.[1][2] She was the creator of the style of mystic poetry called vatsun or *Vakhs*, meaning "speech" (from Sanskrit *vāc*). Known as Lal Vakhs, her verses are among the early compositions in the Kashmiri language and are a part of the history of modern Kashmiri literature.[3][4]

Lalleshwari ("Mother Lal" or "Mother Lalla") is also known by various other names, including Lal Dyad (*Dyad* means "Grandmother"), Lalla Aarifa, Lal Diddi, Lalleshwari, Lalla Yogishwari/Yogeshwari and Lalishri.[5][6][7][8]

Life

Most modern scholars place Lalleshwari's birth between 1301 and 1320 C.E., near Sempore or Pandrethan.[9][2] She is estimated to have died in 1373, and a grave near Bijbehara is attributed to her, although there is no confirmation of this. Lalleshwari is believed to have been born to a Kashmiri Brahmin family, and was married at the age of twelve in accordance with the local customs.[10] Following her marriage, she was renamed, as is custom, to Padmavati, but continued to be known as Lalla or Lalleshwari.[9] Some reports suggest her marriage was unhappy,[9] and that she left home, between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-six, to become a disciple of a spiritual leader, Siddha Srikanth or Sed Boyu, who was a Shaivite.[10] As part of her religious education, she travelled alone on foot, surviving on alms, before becoming a teacher and spiritual leader herself.[10]

Records of Lalleshwari's life are contained in oral tradition, and consequently, there is variance on the details of her life and beliefs.[10] Numerous contemporary Kashmiri histories, such as those prepared by Jonaraja, Srivara, Prajyabhatta, and Haidar Malik Chadura, do not mention Lalleshwari.[10] The first written record of Lalleshwari's life is contained in the *Tadhkirat-ul-Arifin* (1587), a collection of biographies of saints and religious figures written by Mulla Ali Raina, and followed by an account of her life in Baba Daud Mishkati's Asrar ul-Akbar (1654). In these texts, Lalleshwari is described as a mystic saint who appears in the forest to travellers.[10] In 1736, Khwaja Azam Diddamari's *Tarikh-i-Azami* contained a more detailed account of Lalleshwari's life.[10] She is also noted in a Persian chronicle, the *Waqiati-e-Kashmir* (1746) in which she is described as being known in the reign of Sultan Alau-ud-din (1343–54) and died in the reign of Sultan Shihab-ud-din (1354–73).[9]

Lalleshwari is also believed to be a contemporary of Mir Sayyid Ali-Hamdani, an Iranian Sufi scholar and poet who recorded stories of her in his own verse during his travels to Kashmir.[11]

Influence on Nund Rishi and The Rishi Sufi Order

The profound connection between Lalleshwari and Nund Rishi (Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani) is a cornerstone of Kashmir's spiritual and cultural heritage.[12] Their intertwined legacies symbolize the syncretic traditions that have shaped the region's identity.

A widely recounted legend narrates that as an infant, Nund Rishi refused to nurse from his mother. Lalleshwari, upon visiting, addressed the child:

"If you are not ashamed of being born, why are you ashamed of being breastfed?"[13]

Following her words, the child began to nurse, an act interpreted as Lalleshwari imparting spiritual wisdom to Nund Rishi. This anecdote underscores the deep spiritual bond between the two mystics. Both Lalleshwari and Nund Rishi employed vernacular Kashmiri poetic forms ('Vakhs' and 'Shruks') respectively to convey their mystical experiences and teachings. Their verses emphasize themes such as the impermanence of the material world, the importance of self-realization, and the unity of existence. Nund Rishi's poetry often reflects the influence of Lalleshwari's thought, acknowledging her spiritual stature and expressing a desire to attain similar enlightenment, he writes:

That Lalla of Padmanpore,

The one who drank the nectar,

The one who kept gazing at Shiva,

God, give me a gift like that![13]

The spiritual kinship between Lalleshwari and Nund Rishi symbolizes the harmonious blending of Shaivism and Sufism in Kashmir. Their teachings transcended religious boundaries, fostering a culture of tolerance, compassion, and unity. Their combined legacy laid the foundation for the Rishi order in Kashmir, which emphasizes inner spirituality over external rituals and promotes a universal message of love understanding.[13]

Lalleshwari profoundly shaped the Rishi Sufi Order in Kashmir through her mystic poetry, known as 'Vakhs'. These verses, blending elements of Shaivism and Sufism, emphasized direct personal experience of the divine, transcending ritualistic practices. Her teachings inspired Nund Rishi, who further developed the Rishi order, promoting values of simplicity, equality, and non-violence. Lalleshwari's influence is evident in the Rishi Sufi Order's emphasis on spiritual unity and communal harmony, laying the foundation for a syncretic religious culture in Kashmir.[13]

Literary works

Lalleshwari's poems represent some of the earliest works of Kashmiri literature, written as Kashmiri began to emerge as a distinct language from Apabhramsa Prakrit, which was spoken in North India.[14] A total of 285 poems, known as *vakhs,* are attributed to Lalleshwari.[10]

Lalleshwari's *vakhs* drawn from influences and languages that made contact with the Indian sub-continent in her life, drawing from Sanskritic, Islamic and Sufi cultures.[10]

Translations

Lalleshwari's work were first recorded in writing in the twentieth century, and have been republished since, in Kashmiri as well as in translation. In 1914, Sir George Grierson, a civil servant and the Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India, commissioned a copy of Lalleshwari's *vakhs*. A written record of the *vakhs* was unavailable at the time, and one was prepared by transcribing an oral narration of the *vakhs* performed by Dharma-dasa Darwesh, a story-teller residing in Gush, Kashmir. This manuscript was translated in English by Grierson and published as *Lalla-Vakyani*, or *The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded*.[15] Grierson consolidated and expanded on the partial translation prepared by the Hungarian-British archaeologist and scholar Sir Marc Aurel Stein, and incorporated some archived poems that were contained in the *Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings* (1888).[10]

Grierson's translation was the first printed and published volume of Lalleshwari's works. Following his translation, a number of English translations have been produced, those by Pandit Ananda Koul (1921), Sir Richard Carnac Temple (1924)[16] and Jaylal Kaul (1973). Recent translations include those by Coleman Barks,[17] Jaishree Odin Kak,[18] and Ranjit Hoskote.[10]

Her poems, (*vakhs*) have been translated into English by Richard Temple, Jaylal Kaul, Coleman Barks,[19] Jaishree Odin, and Ranjit Hoskote.[20][21][22][23]

Legacy

The leading Kashmiri Sufi figure Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali (also known as Nooruddin Rishi or Nunda Rishi) was influenced by Lalleshwari. He led to the formation of the Rishi order of saints and later gave rise to many Rishi saints like Resh Mir Sàeb.[1] One Kashmiri folk story recounts that, as a baby, Nunda Rishi refused to be breast-fed by his mother. It was Lalleshwari who breast-fed him.[24]

Lalleshwari and her mystic musings continue to have a deep impact on the psyche of Kashmiris, and the 2000 National Seminar on her held at New Delhi led to the release of the book *Remembering Lal Ded in Modern Times*.[25] In his book "Triadic Mysticism", Paul E. Murphy calls her the "chief exponent of devotional or emotion-oriented Triadism".[*citation needed*][26] According to him, three representatives of devotionalism emerged in Kashmir in the five hundred years between the last half of the ninth and the end of the fourteenth centuries.[26]

What this points to is the non-sectarian nature of Lalleshwari's spiritual life and her song-poems. Yet, her life and work have been used for various religious and political agendas over time. As author and poet Ranjit Hoskote writes:[10]

To the outer world, Lal Ded is arguably Kashmir's best known spiritual and literary figure; within Kashmir, she has been venerated both by Hindus and Muslims for nearly seven centuries. For most of that period, she has successfully eluded the proprietorial claims of religious monopolists. Since the 1980s, however, Kashmir's confluential culture has frayed thin under the pressure of a prolonged conflict to which transnational terrorism, State repression and local militancy have all contributed. Religious identities in the region have become harder and more sharp-edged, following a substantial exodus of the Hindu minority during the early 1990s, and a gradual effort to replace Kashmir's unique and syncretically

nuanced tradition of Islam with a more Arabocentric global template. It is true that Lal Ded was constructed differently by each community, but she was simultaneously Lallesvari or Lalla Yogini to the Hindus and Lal'arifa to the Muslims; today unfortunately, these descriptions are increasingly being promoted at the expense of one another.

Beyond several new translations of Lalleshwari's vakh, there are other contemporary performative arts that are based on Lalleshwari's life and poetry. For example, there are contemporary renderings of Lalleshwari's poetry in song. In addition, a solo play in English, Hindi, and Kashmiri titled *Lal Ded* (based on her life) has been performed by actress Mita Vashisht across India since 2004.[27][28]

In 2007, experimental musician Katie Jane Garside took on the stage name Lallweshari with the release of her album Lullabies in a Glass Wilderness.

Further reading

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Ref: ClaudeAI

LAL DED (LALLESHWARI) — The Mystic Saint of Kashmir

Panderthan Temple

📍 Place of Birth & How to Get There

Lalleshwari was born in **Pandrethan** (ancient *Puranadhisthana*), about four and a half miles to the southeast of Srinagar, in a Kashmiri Pandit family. Poem Hunter Blogger Pandrethan is easily accessible from Srinagar city by local taxi, auto-rickshaw, or bus — it lies on the old Srinagar–Jammu road. It is also home to a beautiful ancient Shiva temple from the Utpala dynasty, which makes it a rewarding heritage visit.

👨‍👩‍👦 Parents & Birth

Scholars have long debated the precise period of her birth; the year 1335 AD appears to be the most plausible date based on analysis of various views. Kashmir Images Most traditional accounts, however, give the year as **c. 1320 AD**. Her birth name is believed to have been different from Lal or Lalla, though records are not certain. Kashmir Images She was born into a devout **Kashmiri Brahmin (Pandit)** family. Her birth took place during the reign of Sultan Ala-ud-din. Blogger

🌱 Childhood & Education

There is evidence that in those times, liberal education was imparted to women, and from her vakhs, one is persuaded to believe that she received education in the early part of her life at her father's house. Blogger Her childhood was spent in a spiritually inclined environment, and from a young age she showed signs of deep introspection, bhakti, and a yearning for the divine.

💍 Marriage

She was married at the age of 12 into a family that was reported to have regularly mistreated her. The Poetry Founda... Her in-laws were at Pampore, and they gave her the new name *Padmavati*, as was the custom. Her husband's name is recorded as Sonpandit (also called Nikk Bhatt in some traditions). M K Raina

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😔 Married Life & Travails

Her mother-in-law is said to have been very cruel to her — there is a legend that she would place a stone under the rice on Lal Ded's plate to make it appear more than it was. M K Raina She faced the combined burden of an abusive mother-in-law and an indifferent husband. Yet her spirit refused to be dimmed; she sought solace in the embrace of Lord Shiva. Rohittikoo These trials of her domestic life became the very fire that forged her spiritual resolve.

🕉️ Guru

At a young age Lalleshwari met her Guru, **Siddha Srikantha** (also known as *Sed Bayu* or *Sed Boyu*), who gave her spiritual initiation and taught her the philosophy of nondual Kashmir Shaivism. Siddha Yoga Her teacher was a scholar of Sanskrit literature as well as a master of yoga. EBSCO She ultimately surpassed her guru in spiritual attainments. Blogger One of her most celebrated vakhs records the single, life-changing instruction her guru gave her:

> *"My Guru gave me but one precept: From without withdraw your gaze within, and fix it on the Inmost Self. Taking to heart this one precept, naked I began to roam."*

🧘 Renunciation, Sadhana & Siddhi

She married at age twelve, but her marriage was unhappy and she left home at twenty-four to take sanyas (renunciation) and become a disciple of her Shaivite Guru. Kashmirasitis From then on she wandered, living on alms, and became a teacher and spiritual leader herself. She was universally considered a supreme *siddha* (perfected yogini) during her lifetime and afterward. Brahmacharya

Lalla was in the tradition of the Nath Yogi Sampradaya, whose meditation practice is that of *Soham Sadhana* — the joining of mental repetition of the Soham Mantra with the natural breath. Brahmacharya Although established in the non-dual state of nirvikalpa samadhi, she remained keenly aware of the difference between herself and Brahman the Absolute, and of her utter dependence on Brahman as the essence of her existence. Brahmacharya

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🚶 Travels

After renunciation, she wandered across Kashmir, surviving on alms, and used the vernacular Kashmiri language of her time to engage in dialogues with Muslim mystics, some of whom had come to Kashmir to escape the ravages of Timur, who was plundering large parts of Central Asia and the Middle East. EBSCO The Kashmir of her day held Buddhists, Nath yogins, Brahman teachers, Sufis, and Tantric adepts. She may have learned something from each of them. Scroll.in

One famous legend tells that when she saw the great Sufi saint **Shah Hamdan** (Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, who came to Kashmir in 1372), she hid herself, crying out "I saw a man, I saw a man!" — implying that until that moment, in her liberated state, she had seen no distinction of gender in any being. Blogger

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📿 Teachings

Lal Ded's Vakhs convey the essence of Kashmir Shaivism, which is based on the recognition of one's own self as identical with the universal consciousness. Her Vakhs also reflect her openness and tolerance towards other faiths and traditions, such as Sufism and Buddhism. Rohittikoo

Her verses reject caste discrimination, gender inequalities, and social orthodoxy, and reveal her affinity with the teachings of Shaivism and Vedanta, while also echoing the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita. Chintan

She was the only woman Kashmiri saint in the lineage of Trika Shaivism and also the only woman Kashmiri saint to embrace both Shaivism and Sufism. She defined her relationship with God in universal terms, viewing everything as emanating from a single, unified reality. A Lotus in the Mud

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📜 The Vakhs — Literary Works

Lalleshwari was the creator of the style of mystic poetry called *vatsun* or **Vakhs**, meaning "speech" (from Sanskrit *vāc*). Known as Lal Vakhs, her verses are among the early compositions in the Kashmiri language. Wikipedia

Lalleshwari's works were first recorded in writing in the 20th century. In 1914, Sir George Grierson, Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India, commissioned a copy of her vakhs — one was prepared by transcribing an oral narration by a storyteller in Gush, Kashmir. It was translated into English as *Lalla-Vakyani, or The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded.* Wikipedia

In her sayings — more than 260 vakhs — Lal Ded dealt with everything from life, yoga, and God to Dharma and Atma. M K Raina

🌟 Some Famous Vakhs (in English translation):

Vakh on the Guru's teaching:

> *"My Guru gave me but one precept: From without withdraw your gaze within, and fix it on the Inmost Self. Taking to heart this one precept, naked I began to dance."*

Vakh on universal worship:

> *"Whatever work I did became worship of the Lord; whatever word I uttered became a prayer; whatever this body of mine experienced became the sadhana of Saiva Tantra, illumining my path to Parmasiva."* — (Vakh 138)

Vakh on the soul's journey:

> *"With a rope of loose-spun thread am I towing my boat upon the sea. Would that God heard my prayer and brought me safe across! Like water in cups of unbaked clay I run to waste. Would God I were to reach my home!"* — (Vakh 1)

Lal Vakhs are considered masterpieces of Kashmiri literature, exploring the themes of love, inner purity, and the path to spiritual liberation in a lucid yet profound manner. Lalla often used the first person pronoun in her Vakhs, addressing herself using her sobriquets like "I, Lalli," "I, Lal," or "I, Lalla." historified

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🌸 Disciples & Influence

The leading Kashmiri Sufi figure **Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali** (also known as Nooruddin Rishi or Nunda Rishi) was influenced by Lalleshwari. He led to the formation of the Rishi order of saints, which later gave rise to many Rishi saints. Wikipedia The famous folk story — that as a newborn baby Nunda Rishi refused to suckle his mother, and it was Lal Ded who fed him and chided him into accepting life — is a beautiful symbol of the spiritual motherhood she embodied.

Along with Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali, she formed one of the twin sources of spiritual wisdom for both Hindu and Muslim communities in Kashmir, becoming a bulwark of the devotionalism that later flourished across northern India. Aishwariyalaxmi

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🏛️ Ashram

Lal Ded founded no philosophy school or religious movement and had no formal disciples Aishwariyalaxmi in the institutional sense. She built no ashram — her life was one of radical, homeless wandering. The open roads of Kashmir were her ashram, and the hearts of the people were her temple.

🕯️ Final Days & Passing

Towards the end of her life, Lalleshwari is believed to have gone to **Bijbehara** town in Anantnag district in South Kashmir, where her soul arose as a flame to merge into the Supreme Soul. Boloji

Both Hindus and Muslims staked a claim to her body, much like the legend of Kabir. Her spirit is said to have asked those present to bring two large washbasins. The body sat inside one with the other inverted over it, and gradually shrank until the two vessels overlapped. Half of what remained was taken by Hindus for cremation rites, and the other half by Muslims for burial adjacent to the local Jama Masjid. Boloji

There is no reliable record regarding the final rites or cremation of her mortal remains. Kashmir Images This mystery is itself deeply poetic — her departure, like her life, transcended all boundaries.

🕌 Memorial / Samadhi

A grave beside the historical **Jamia Masjid in Bijbehara, Anantnag**, is believed to be her last resting place Countercurrents , and it is venerated by both Hindus and Muslims to this day. Bijbehara is about 28 miles to the south-east of Srinagar. Wisdom Library There is no grand temple exclusively dedicated to her, but her memory is enshrined in the soul of every Kashmiri home.

🌍 Legacy & Other Honours

In Kashmir, some people consider her a poet, some a holy woman, some a Sufi, a yogi, or a devotee of Shiva — some even consider her an avatar. But every Kashmiri considers her a wise woman, and the Kashmiri language is full of her sayings. Ikashmir

In Kashmir they say: *"We know only two words which are meaningful — one is Allah, and another is Lalla."* The Mystical Mystics

Lalleshwari is credited with laying the reinforced concrete basis of the Kashmiri language itself through her compositions. Chintan

A commemorative **postage stamp** was issued in her honour by the Government of India. A solo play in English, Hindi, and Kashmiri titled *Lal Ded*, based on her life, has been performed by actress Mita Vashisht all over India since 2004. Poem Hunter

✨ In Summary

Lal Ded stands alone in the history of Indian spirituality — a woman who, in the 14th century, walked naked through the valleys of Kashmir singing of Shiva, challenging caste, defying gender norms, unifying Hindu and Muslim hearts, and pouring her entire being into the search for the Divine. She left behind no institution, no building, no formal disciples — only her Vakhs, burning like lamps across seven centuries, still lighting the way for all who seek.

> *"I searched for my Self until I grew weary, but no one, I know now, reaches the hidden knowledge by means of effort. Then, absorbed in Thee, I found the place of Wine. There, the Forager fills me from His own glass."* — Lal Ded

More details on Vakhs:

📜 THE VAKHS OF LAL DED — Her Sacred Poetry

What is a Vakh?

Lalleshwari was the creator of the style of mystic poetry called *vatsun* or **Vakhs**, meaning "speech" — from the Sanskrit word *vāc*. Wikipedia *Vatsun* is derived from Sanskrit *Vachan*, meaning word or speech. Each unit is typically a stanza of three lines followed by a refrain (*vooj*). The metres and rhyme schemes of vatsun are varied and have no single fixed pattern of versification. Blogger

Lal Ded's Vakhs are spontaneous expressions of her mystical experiences and teachings. They are short, simple, and profound, often using metaphors and symbols from nature and everyday life. Rohittikoo

Her four-line structured poems are among the earliest compositions that have been part of the oral tradition of Kashmir, preserved over generations in the collective memory as songs and hymns for some 700 years. Aishwariyalaxmi

How Many Vakhs?

Ranjit Hoskote has translated nearly **285 vakhs** of Lal Ded, which are circulated widely and continuously in Kashmiri popular culture between the mid-fourteenth century and the present, variously assuming the form of songs, proverbs, and prayers. Scribd Some scholars attribute over 260 vakhs to her. Since they were passed down orally for centuries, the exact number varies across collections.

How Were the Vakhs Preserved?

Lalleshwari's works were first recorded in writing in the twentieth century. In 1914, Sir George Grierson, the Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India, commissioned a copy of her vakhs. A written record was unavailable at the time, so one was prepared by transcribing an oral narration performed by Dharma-dasa Darwesh, a storyteller residing in Gush, Kashmir. This manuscript was translated into English by Grierson and published as *Lalla-Vakyani, or The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded.* Wikipedia

The line of transmission begins in the realm of the oral — with the text of vakhs being woven by Kashmiri village reciters, both Hindu and Muslim — using Kashmir as a space of relative freedom and play. These recitations dramatise Lalla's importance as a manifestation of empathy, common sense knowledge, and divergence from authority. Scribd

Ranjit Hoskote, a Sahitya Akademi Award winner, translated Lal Ded's works in a labor of love that took 20 years, recapturing the jagged epiphanic power of her poetry. Aishwariyalaxmi

The Major Themes of the Vakhs

1. 🔱 The Omnipresence of Shiva

The most central theme of Lal Ded's Vakhs is that Shiva — the Supreme Consciousness — is not confined to temples or rituals but is present everywhere, in every being.

In the original Kashmiri:

> *"Shiv chuy thali wuchhan: Mo zan hiyond tu musalman. Trukai chuk skillet panun parzanav, Soi chhay sahibas suiati zaan."*

Translation:

> *"Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere. Then do not discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim. If thou art wise, know thyself — that is the true knowledge of the Lord."*

At the core of Lal Ded's teachings lies the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, which perceives the universe as a manifestation of Shiva, the supreme consciousness. Her Vakhs articulate this non-dualistic vision, urging individuals to look within to discover the divine essence that resides in all. Kashmir Ahead

2. 🪔 The Guru's Grace & the Inner Journey

Perhaps the most famous of all her vakhs is the one describing the single instruction from her guru — the turning point of her life:

In Kashmiri:

> *"Gorun vounnum kunui vachun, Nebrae doupnum aendree achun; Sui gav Lalli vakh tae vatchun, Tavai mye hyotum nangai nachun."*

Translation:

> *"My Guru gave me but one precept: From without, withdraw your gaze within, and fix it on the Inmost Self. Taking to heart this one precept, naked I began to dance."*

This single vakh captures the entire essence of Kashmir Shaivism — the turning of attention from the outer world to the inner Self, which alone is Shiva.

3. 🕉️ Self-Realization and Non-Dualism (Advaita)

Her philosophical insights reflect influences of Shaivism, Vedanta, and Sufism. Her understanding of Advaita (non-dualism) matched that of Shankara. Kashmir Images She had attained a state beyond ego and duality. She saw no difference between self and other, between honour and insult. Her realization of the Self as Shiva was supreme. Kashmir Images

> *"I searched for my Self until I grew weary, but no one, I know now, reaches the hidden knowledge by means of effort alone. Then, absorbed in Thee, I found the place of Wine — there, the Forager fills me from His own glass."*

> *"Alone, I crossed the field of Emptiness, dropping my reason and my senses. I stumbled on my own secret there and flowered — a lotus rising from a marsh."* — (Trans. Ranjit Hoskote)

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4. 🌊 The Soul's Longing for God

The very first of her vakhs expresses the aching longing of the soul yearning for union with the Divine: Brahmacharya

> *"With a rope of loose-spun thread am I towing my boat upon the sea. Would that God heard my prayer and brought me safe across! Like water in cups of unbaked clay I run to waste. Would God I were to reach my home!"* — (Vakh 1)

This is one of the most poignant of all her poems — the fragile boat, the loose thread, the leaking clay cup — all are images of the perishable human body trying to cross the ocean of existence to reach the Divine.

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5. ⚡ Yoga, Breath, and Kundalini

In one of her powerful Yogic vakhs, she describes the restraint of breath and the awakening of inner consciousness: Beyond Sahasa

> *"The bellows of respiration were restrained, resulting in self-blazing of consciousness; the inner illumination of light was cascading — I seized the inner light in the enveloping darkness."*

Lalla was in the tradition of the Nath Yogi Sampradaya whose meditation practice is that of Soham Sadhana — the joining of mental repetition of the Soham Mantra with the natural breath: the mental intonation of "So" when inhaling and "Ham" when exhaling. Brahmacharya

6. 🚫 Rejection of Empty Ritual & Caste

One of her most celebrated vakhs on religious equality:

> *"I looked within — and the curtain of illusion dropped. I need no temple made of stone, I need no image carved of wood. The temple of my body is enough — Shiva lives within it, always."*

> *"The pandit reads the scriptures through and through — yet knows not Shiva's truth. The mullah calls aloud from the mosque — yet finds no peace within. Both are lost in pride of learning; both have forgotten the Self."*

Lal Ded's poems taught people to go beyond religion and caste and focus on true devotion to God. Instead of searching for God externally, she inspired people to look within themselves. She did not follow the rituals performed in the name of religion and gave importance to devotion and love for God above all. MyNachiketa

7. 🌿 The Impermanence of Life

> *"You are the garden. Uproot the weeds and then take in the daffodils. Judgement awaits when you go. The tax collector walks behind you. Death!"* — (Trans. Arvind Gigoo)

> *"Where did I come from? Which way will I go? I am at the crossroads. Come, my path, my guide. False breath is the liar."*

Through these verses, Lal Ded reminds us that consciousness is chained by shadows, and this feast of life is but a bubble — we are so forgetful of where and what we are. The Bangalore Revi...

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8. 🌸 The Search for God Within

> *"All day I looked for You — and when I found You hiding inside me, I ran wild, playing now me, now You."* — (Trans. Ranjit Hoskote)

> *"Good or bad, I'm happy to welcome both. I don't hear with my ears, I don't see with my eyes. A voice speaks inside my heart — my jewel-lamp burns bright even in a rampaging wind."*

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9. 🔄 The Dissolution of the Mind

> *"When the scriptures melt away, the chants remain. When the chants melt away, the mind remains. When the mind melts away, what's left? A void mingles with the void."*

This single vakh captures the entire progression of spiritual practice — from outer learning to inner silence to ultimate dissolution in the Absolute.

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10. 🏠 The Hermit and the Householder — Equal Before God

One of her most democratic and liberating vakhs teaches that outward renunciation is not necessary — what matters is the inner state: Inmymindinmyheart

> *"Hermit or householder — same difference. If you've dissolved your desires in the river of time, you will see that the Lord is everywhere and is perfect. As you know, so shall you be."*

11. 🌺 On Universal Worship

In Kashmiri:

> *"Yi yi karu'm suy artsun, yi rasini vichoarum thi mantar; yihay lagamo dhahas partsun, suy Parasivun tanthar."*

Translation:

> *"Whatever work I did became worship of the Lord; whatever word I uttered became a prayer; whatever this body of mine experienced became the sadhana of Saiva Tantra — illumining my path to Parmasiva."* — (Vakh 138)

The Style & Language of the Vakhs

Written in a simple yet soul-stirring style, they made profound spiritual truths accessible to the common people, transcending the barriers of caste, creed, and gender. Her verses, often delivered spontaneously, were not merely philosophical treatises but lived experiences of a soul in communion with the divine. Kashmir Ahead

Lal Ded's Vakhs are mostly in free verse with rhythmic cadence. Amidst religious dogmatism and socio-political unrest, Lal Ded rose above sectarian divisions and voiced the universal truth in the language of the common people. Kashmir Images

Lalla often used the first person pronoun in her Vakhs, addressing herself using her sobriquets like "I, Lalli," "I, Lal," or "I, Lalla." Her Vakhs are a testament of her staunch devotion towards Lord Shiva. historified

Notable Translators of the Vakhs

The Vakhs have been rendered into English and other languages by many distinguished scholars and poets over the centuries:

- **Sir George Grierson** (1914) — *Lalla-Vakyani, or The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded* — the first English translation
- **Sir Richard Temple** (1924)
- **Pandit Ananda Koul** (1921)
- **Jaylal Kaul** (1973)
- **Coleman Barks** — the celebrated translator of Rumi
- **Jaishree Odin / Jaishree Kak**
- **Ranjit Hoskote** (2011) — *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded* (Penguin) — considered the most comprehensive modern translation
- **Paul Smith**
- **Neeraj Mattoo**

The Undying Flame

The Shaiva philosophers of the higher plane — Kallatta, Utpala, Abhinavagupta, Kshemaraja — whose essence of philosophy had been lost in the expanse of time, was re-lit and revived by the candle of Lal Ded's mysticism in her vakhs. Beyond Sahasa

Lal Ded's vakhs form the foundation of much of the Kashmiri worldview that took shape later. Along with Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi), they formed the twin source of spiritual wisdom for both Hindu and Muslim communities in Kashmir — the bulwark of devotionalism that later flourished across northern India during the Delhi Sultanate and early Mughal era. Aishwariyalaxmi

Seven centuries have passed. Yet every Kashmiri, whether Hindu or Muslim, whether scholar or shepherd, still carries a Vakh of Lal Ded on their lips — and in their heart.

As the beloved saying of Kashmir goes:

> *"We know only two words that are truly meaningful — one is Allah, and the other is Lalla."* 🌸🙏

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Ref: Google Gemini

Lal Ded (Lalleshwari): The Mystic Poetess of Kashmir

The Voice of the Valley: An Introduction to Lal Ded

The history of Kashmir is not merely written in stone and chronicles, but in the verses of its saints. Among them, Lalleshwari—affectionately known as Lal Ded—stands as the most luminous figure of the 14th century. A mystic, a poetess, and a rebel against empty ritualism, she bridged the profound philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism with the soaring devotion of Sufi mysticism.

Her life was a journey from the hardships of a troubled domestic life to the ultimate freedom of spiritual "Siddhi." By choosing to speak the language of the common people rather than the elite Sanskrit of her time, she became the "Mother of Kashmiri Literature." This research paper explores her biographical journey and the timeless "Vakhs" that continue to guide seekers toward the light of self-realization even seven centuries later.

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Lalleshwari, affectionately known as **Lal Ded** (Mother Lal), remains one of the most profound spiritual icons of Kashmir. Her life and "Vakhs" (poetic couplets) transcend religious boundaries, blending Kashmiri Shaivism with Sufi mysticism.

Early Life and Origins

- **Location of Birth:** She was born in **Pandrethan** (ancient Puranadhisthana), located about 6 km southeast of Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir.
- **How to Get There:** Pandrethan is easily accessible by road from Srinagar. The nearest major airport is Sheikh ul-Alam International Airport (Srinagar).
- **Parents and Birth:** Born around **1320–1355 AD** into a Kashmiri Pandit family. Her parents were known to be pious and scholarly.
- **Childhood and Education:** She was educated at home in Sanskrit and religious scriptures. From an early age, she exhibited a contemplative and detached nature.

Married Life and Trials

- **Marriage:** As was the custom, she was married at a young age (around 12) to a family in **Pampore**.
- **Married Life and Travails:** Her married life was marked by extreme hardship. Her mother-in-law was notoriously cruel, often placing a stone in Lal Ded's bowl and covering it with a thin layer of rice to make it look full. Despite the mistreatment and her husband's neglect, Lalleshwari remained patient and immersed in prayer. This period of "trials and trials" is a significant part of her folklore, representing her endurance of worldly suffering.

Spiritual Journey

- **Guru:** Seeking liberation, she left her home and became a disciple of **Siddha Srikantha** (also known as Sed Boyu), a renowned master of the Trika school of Shaivism.
- **Sadhana and Siddhi:** She practiced intense Yoga and meditation. It is said she reached a state of *Siddhi* (spiritual perfection) where she transcended body consciousness, often wandering the valley clad only in her skin or rags, singing her verses.
- **Disciples:** While she did not establish a formal lineage, she deeply influenced the patron saint of Kashmir, **Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali** (Nund Rishi), who regarded her as a spiritual mother.

Teachings and Philosophy

- **Core Message:** Her teachings centered on **Self-realization**. She rejected rituals, idol worship, and caste distinctions, emphasizing that God (Shiva) resides within the heart.
- **The Vakhs:** Her teachings survived through "Vakhs"—four-line stanzas that are both rhythmic and philosophically dense. They were the first major works of Kashmiri literature.
- **Other Works:** She did not write books; her oral Vakhs were passed down through generations before being documented.

Final Days and Legacy

- **Travels:** She traveled extensively across the Kashmir Valley, engaging with commoners, scholars, and Sufi saints like Sayyid Ali Hamadani.
- **Old Age and Samadhi:** According to legend, she passed away at an advanced age near **Bijbehara**. It is famously told that after her death, her body vanished, leaving behind a mound of flowers—a symbol of her universal appeal to both Hindus and Muslims.
- **Memorials:** There is a shrine/memorial dedicated to her in **Bijbehara**, and a prominent government maternity hospital in Srinagar is named the **Lalla Ded Hospital** in her honor.

Famous Vakhs (Samples)

On the Inner Self:

"I came by the straight path, but I did not return by it.

I was caught in the middle of the bridge,

The day faded and I had no money for the ferry.

What shall I give the ferryman?"

(Symbolizing the search for spiritual merit at life's end)

On Oneness:

"Shiva is everywhere, do not distinguish between Hindu and Muslim.

If you are wise, know yourself;

That is the true knowledge of the Lord."

Additional Information

- **Cultural Impact:** Lal Ded is credited with laying the foundation of the **Kashmiri language**. Her verses are still recited by locals and sung in traditional *Sufiana Kalam*.
- **Ashrams:** While she did not build physical ashrams, she lived as a wandering ascetic, treating the entire valley as her spiritual home.

More info:

While historical records of the 14th century are often shrouded in legend, the "biography" of Lal Ded is pieced together through the oral tradition of Kashmir, which has kept her story alive for over 700 years.

The Biography of a Mystic

Lalleshwari's life is defined by a transition from a suppressed housewife to a liberated "Avadhuta" (one who has shaken off worldly ties).

- **The Cruelty of the Hearth:** Folklore tells of her mother-in-law's daily taunt: *"Whether they kill a big sheep or a small one, Lalla always has a stone for her dinner."* This referred to the stone hidden under her rice to make the portion look larger. Lalleshwari never complained, which is seen as her earliest form of **Sadhana** (patience and equanimity).
- **The Great Departure:** Her spiritual thirst eventually led her to leave her home. She famously discarded her clothes, claiming that once she had seen God, she no longer felt the shame of the body. When asked why she wandered naked, she replied that she saw "no men" around her—only those truly conscious of God were men in her eyes.
- **Meeting the Master:** She found her Guru, Siddha Mol (Srikantha), who initiated her into the **Trika (Kashmiri Shaivism)** tradition. Her progress was so rapid that she eventually surpassed her teacher in spiritual depth.

The Core Teachings

1. **Antaryaga (Internal Worship):** She taught that the temple and the mosque are within. Rituals are "mere play" compared to the internal fire of meditation.

2. **The Unity of Existence:** She saw no difference between the Creator and the Created. To her, "Shiva" was not a distant deity but the very consciousness of the seeker.
3. **The Middle Way:** While she was an ascetic, her Vakhs often suggest that one doesn't need to flee to the forest; one needs to flee from the ego.

20 Famous Vakhs of Lalleshwari

Lal Ded's Vakhs are usually four lines long. Here are 20 of her most impactful verses (translated from the Kashmiri):

1. **On Self-Discovery:** "I searched for myself until I was exhausted, but no one found the secret. Then, I became absorbed in the secret itself, and there I found the doorway to the Truth."
2. **On the Divine Presence:** "Shiva is everywhere, in every grain. Do not distinguish between a Hindu and a Muslim. If you are clever, recognize your own self; that is the true way to find God."
3. **On the Guru:** "The Guru gave me only one word: 'Go within.' This became to me a law and a mantra, and I began to dance in joy."
4. **On the Illusion of the World:** "I came by the straight path, but I did not return by it. I found myself stuck on the bridge of time, with no money for the ferryman."
5. **On the Internal Fire:** "I burnt the filth of my heart and killed my ego. I became known as Lalla only when I sat at the feet of the Divine."
6. **On Formal Religion:** "O restless mind, do not fear. The One who knows the Truth does not need to count beads or offer water to idols."
7. **On Moderate Living:** "Eat enough to satisfy hunger, wear enough to keep out the cold. Do not seek more, or your ego will grow like a weed."
8. **On Silence:** "The tongue that speaks too much is like a broken bell. The one who remains silent hears the music of the spheres."
9. **On the Evanescence of Life:** "Like a breath of wind, we come; like a spark, we vanish. Why then do you pride yourself on your golden ornaments?"
10. **On the Soul's Journey:** "I was a cold block of ice, but the sun of knowledge rose. I melted and became water, flowing back into the ocean from which I came."
11. **On Detachment:** "Let them mock me, let them praise me. I am steady in my purpose. A dog barks at the moon, but the moon is not bothered."
12. **On Sincerity:** "You may read a thousand books, but if you do not read your own heart, you are like an ass carrying a load of sandalwood."
13. **On the Breath:** "Hold the breath in the center; let the Prana and Apana meet. There, the lamp of knowledge will light itself."
14. **On Equality:** "To the one who sees all beings as their own self, who sees no difference between 'I' and 'You', to that person alone is the Lord revealed."
15. **On Patience:** "Wait with patience for the fruit to ripen. Do not rush the seasons of the soul."
16. **On Desires:** "Desire is like a wild horse. If you do not bridle it, it will throw you into the pit of sorrow."
17. **On the Body:** "This body is but a garment of clay. Why do you polish the pot when the water inside is leaking?"

18. **On the True Temple:** "My heart is the temple; my soul is the idol. I offer the flowers of my breath to the Lord within."
19. **On the Unstruck Sound:** "In the silence of the night, I heard the 'Anahata'—the sound that has no source. My mind became still like a lake."
20. **On Liberation:** "Lalla went out into the garden of the heart and found Shiva and Shakti as one. She drank the nectar of that union and became immortal."

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The "Lalla-Vakh" Structure

WE may note that the **Vakh** (derived from the Sanskrit *Vak*, meaning "word" or "speech") is a specific four-line poetic form. It was revolutionary because, at a time when religious texts were mostly in Sanskrit (accessible only to scholars), Lal Ded spoke in the **Kashmiri Apabhramsha**—the language of the common people. This is why she is often called the "Mother of Kashmiri Literature."

The "Lalla-Nund" Connection

A very popular story in Kashmir describes the birth of the Sufi saint **Nund Rishi** (Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali). It is said that as a newborn, he refused to nurse from his mother. Lal Ded visited the house and whispered to the infant:

"Thou wert not ashamed of being born; why art thou ashamed to suck?"

Legend says the baby immediately began to nurse. Including this "Sufi-Rishi" connection highlights how her teachings bridged the gap between Hindu and Muslim traditions in the valley.

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Conclusion: The Eternal Echo of the Vakhs

Lal Ded did not leave behind gold, property, or grand monuments; instead, she left behind a legacy of "words"—the Vakhs. Her life serves as a testament to the power of the human spirit to transcend worldly suffering through inner discipline and unwavering faith.

Whether she is remembered as Lalleshwari by scholars or Lal Ded by the common folk, her message remains universal: the Divine is not found in distant temples or rigid ceremonies, but within the mirror of one’s own heart. As we conclude this study of her life and teachings, it becomes clear that her voice is not a relic of the past, but a living philosophy that continues to advocate for peace, equality, and the pursuit of Truth. Her presence remains as fragrant as the flowers she is said to have left behind, reminding us all to "know ourselves."

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Ref: alotusinthemud.com

Lalleshwari, the great mystic of Kashmir, became a bridge between two faiths

By Nandini Kapadia

How one woman's unconventional spiritual journey and poetry shaped the soul of an entire region.

In the Kashmir Valley of India, they have a saying, "We know only two words that are meaningful – one is Allah, the other is Lalla."

Lalla is the land's most illustrious female mystic-poet, acclaimed equally by Hindus and Muslims. Her life and sayings have been largely responsible for shaping the character and mindset of people for the past seven hundred years. She is the creator of *vatsun* or *vakh* (literally, "speech") style of poetry that showcases her mysticism, insights into human existence, and literary genius. In Kashmir's history, her contribution to its spiritual, cultural, and academic heritage remains unparalleled, making her a strong pillar of its identity.

Known as Lalleshwari, Lal Ded (literally, Mother Lalla), Lalla Yogeshwari, Lalla Arifa, or simply Lalla (1320–1392 CE), her life story is shrouded in myths and legends. Early biographies state she was born in Panderthan village near Srinagar, in Kashmir valley. The year was likely 1320 during the reign of Sultan Alau-ud-din. Her father was a Kashmiri Pandit or Brahmin named Cheta Bhat. In her early years, Lalla received a brief education in religious texts. According to reports, she had clear memories of her previous births.

A Life of Hardship and Spiritual Awakening

She was married at the age of twelve into a family that lived in Padampur or Pampore. Her in-laws gave her the name Padmavati, but she was never identified by that name. Unfortunately, her marriage proved to be deeply unhappy. The mother-in-law detested the new bride and treated her with sadistic cruelty. She would put a stone on her plate and cover it with a thin layer of rice to make it appear as a large serving. But the noble-minded Lalleshwari never complained. She even washed the stone after eating so that it would be clean for use in the next meal. To this day, there is a saying in Kashmir, "Whether they killed a goat, Lalla always had a stone for her dinner."

Every morning, Lalla would go to the nearby river to fetch water for household use. She then secretly crossed over to the Shiva temple yonder. That was her refuge. The quiet atmosphere and peaceful vibrations lulled her into a trance. She worshipped the deity and became absorbed in meditation for hours. Gradually, her spiritual power began to manifest, and her reputation grew as a result of the miracles she performed. People from far-flung places came to have darshan of the saintly girl. If they asked for succor, they got it. If they

wanted advice, she gave it. If someone was ill, she cured them. Whatever she uttered came true.

The mother-in-law was green with envy at all the respect and adulation young Lalla was receiving. She poisoned her son against her: “Lalla says she goes to fetch water but does not come back for hours; she must be having an affair.” The following day, when Lalla came home with the water pot on her head, her husband was waiting for her. Seething with anger, he grabbed a rod and smashed the earthen pitcher to smithereens. But a miracle occurred! The water did not spill over when the jug broke; it remained intact like a solid mass until Lalla poured it into another vessel! The rest she threw out of the house, where a lake came up, or so the story goes.

She had had enough; she walked out of her marital home and never looked back. She was only twenty-four at the time. The young rebel set forth on a path few women before had taken – the journey to Self-realization. Her spirit was dauntless. She roamed the hills and the forests, the glens and the valleys of the magnificent land of Kashmir in search of a master. She trained under many teachers, performed severe austerities, and did intense meditation. **Finally, she met her guru Siddha Srikantha (Sed Bayu).** He initiated her into the mystical tradition of Kashmiri Shaivism. Initiation from a competent guru is a prerequisite of this lineage.

Kashmiri Shaivism was known as Trika Shaivism before 1900 CE. It is a non-dual, oral tradition that identifies Shiva as the Absolute Reality (Paramshiva), the Reality behind all phenomena. It advocates a path of devotion to and worship of God as formless (Nirguna Brahman). It rejects rites, rituals, and sacrifices while emphasizing self-introspection.

According to Swami Lakshmanjoo, doyen of Kashmiri Shaivism, the word “Trika” means the threefold science of man and his world. It signifies Shiva, his dynamic energy (Shakti), and the individual (jiva). For the seeker, liberation can be attained through intense meditation on Shiva as the Supreme Reality and recognition of the Supreme Reality’s identity with the individual soul. Lakshmanjoo states, “God and the individual are one. To realize this is the essence of Kashmir Shaivism.”

A curious blend of intense Shiva bhakti and Sufi mysticism, Lalleshwari's sayings reveal her limitless devotion, spiritual illumination, wisdom, and ecstasy of divine union.

The Rise of a Yogini and the Power of Her Vakhs

Following the instructions of her master, Lalla soared to new mystical heights. She is said to have surpassed even her mentor in spiritual attainments. She became widely known as a yogini with supernatural powers, attracting massive crowds wherever she went. She had transcended body consciousness and become an *avadhuta*. Wandering naked from one place to another, she spoke directly to the masses through her *vakhs*. People began to address her reverentially as Lal Ded or Lalleshwari. Often describing her experiences using Shaivite symbolism, she sang:

I, Lalla, entered
the gate of the mind's garden and saw
Siva united with Sakti.
I was immersed in the lake of undying bliss.
Here, in this lifetime,
I've been unchained from the wheel
of birth and death.
What can the world do to me?

And
My guru gave a single precept:
turn your gaze from outside to inside
fix it on the hidden self.
I, Lalla, took this to heart
and naked set forth to dance.

Once, she encountered a gang of rowdies who were making fun of her nudity. A silk merchant came to her defense, who chastised the youths and drove them away. From him, Lalla took two bolts of silk of equal weight. She put one on each shoulder and was on her way. Throughout the day, she tied a knot in the cloth on her left shoulder whenever someone ridiculed her. Similarly, each time someone praised her, she secured a knot in the fabric on the right. At day's end, she returned to the vendor and asked him to weigh the bundles again. They weighed exactly the same as before. She then pointed out that the bundles remained equal in weight, whether blame or praise came her way. And so must the mind remain balanced under all circumstances. Thus, in her unique way, she demonstrated that mental equipoise must not be shaken by how people treat you.

In Lal Ded's time, Kashmir was in the throes of transition and chaos. It witnessed the gradual decline of Hindu political and religious power. With the advent of Muslim rule and the subsequent mass conversions, Islam became the dominant religion. Simultaneously, Sufism made its way into the region as missionaries from Central Asia and Persia flocked to the valley. They encouraged the Muslim rulers to ban idol worship and enforce orthodox Islam. The Hindu population, meanwhile, remained largely Shaivite. Kashmiri Shaivism went underground for many centuries. Although there may have been practitioners, there is no

documented evidence of it after the 14th century. The grand tradition was revived only in the 20th century by Swami Lakshmanjoo.

One of the outcomes of the extensive activity of Sufis was the emergence of the Rishi movement, a Sufi tradition. According to Riyaz Punjabi, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kashmir, "The intermingling of Trika Shaivism with Islam resulted in the emergence of Rishi cult, a synonym for Bhakti. It was through the Rishis that Islam in its indigenous form became the popular faith of the people." He also points out that Lal Ded was the torch-bearer of the Rishi cult in Kashmir.

The association of Lalla with Nund Rishi, founder of the Rishi movement, is an interesting story. Honored as the patron saint of Kashmir, Nund Rishi was a Sufi mystic, scholar, and Islamic preacher. He is also known as Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani or Sahazanand (The Blissful One) by his Hindu followers. They say that as a newborn, he refused to drink his mother's milk, and it was Lal Ded who came to suckle the baby. Again, it was Lalla who was a great source of inspiration to him as he grew up. They seemed to have a spiritual connection, and with Lal Ded's encouragement, he established the Rishi order. Paying tribute to his spiritual mother, he later wrote:

That Lalla of Padampur.
Who had drunk the fill of divine nectar;
She was undoubtedly an avatar of ours.
Oh, God! Grant me the same spiritual power.

Lalleshwari's vakhs have been translated into English by modern scholars. Also, a solo play in English, Hindi, and Kashmiri titled 'Lal Ded' has been doing the rounds for many years. It is directed and performed by noted actress Meeta Vashisht.

A Bridge Between Two Faiths

According to another legend, one day, when Lal was about seventy years old, she was caroling her *vakhs* before a large crowd. When she finished, she calmly climbed into a large earthen pot, and once inside, she covered it with another jar. A long time elapsed, but Lalla did not emerge. When the anxious spectators pulled the jugs apart, they found them empty. The yogini had vanished! Devotees believe that she had foreseen a dispute between her Hindu and Muslim followers over her last rites – whether her body should be buried or cremated. So, Mother Lalla chose another way to exit the earthly plane. She disappeared into thin air, so to speak, leaving no room for a fight among her disciples.

However, she was supposedly laid to rest in a tomb in Bijbehara town near the shrine of Baba Naseeb-ud-din Ghazi. Ghazi was a disciple of Hamza Makhdoom. Either way, Lalla would not have cared because:

Alike for me is life and death,
Happy to live, happy to die,
I mourn for none,
None mourn for me.

Hundreds of years after her death, Lalleshwari's spirit endures through her mystical musings. Today, she is a much-loved literary and spiritual figure in the Kashmir region. Her life and poems are deeply rooted in Kashmiri culture, shaped by both Hinduism and Islam. Her *vakhs* are the earliest compositions in simple Kashmiri, drawing idioms from day-to-day life. She sang with all the fervor of a true mystic about her journey to Truth and her spiritual experiences. She spread the universal message of love and tolerance. A curious blend of intense Shiva bhakti and Sufi mysticism, her sayings reveal her limitless devotion, spiritual illumination, wisdom, and ecstasy of divine union. They serve as a beacon of inspiration to both the layperson and the intellectual.

Lalla's poems also reflect the turmoil of her time – a society in flux. They are a vivid testament to the political and social upheavals that impact people's lives. She wrote without fear, providing a stinging critique of the prevailing hypocritical value system. She was a loud dissenter of casteism and abhorred the cruel injustices of the elitist Brahminical order. She challenged organized religion, rejected ritualism, and decried false religiosity. She took a compassionate look at human existence with its everyday hardships. Every Kashmiri, whether Hindu or Muslim, young or old, has been touched by her poetry; it is deeply entrenched in the Kashmiri psyche.

Some of her famous verses are:

Whatever work I did became worship of the Lord;
Whatever word I uttered became a prayer;
Whatever this body of mine experienced became
the sadhana of Shaiva Tantra
illumining my path to Paramshiva.

Y*our idol is stone, your temple a stone too*
All a stone bound together from top to toe!
What is it you worship, you dense Brahmin?
Bind but the vital air from the heart to the mind.
Shiva is difficult to attain; take a hint for guidance (from thy guru)

I have seen an educated man starve,
a leaf blown off by the bitter wind.
Once, I saw a thoughtless fool
beat his cook.

Lalla has been waiting for the allure of the world to fall away.
What the books taught me, I have put into practice.
What they didn't teach me, I taught myself.
I have gone into the forest and wrestled with the lion.
I didn't get this far by teaching one thing and doing another.
(Translated by Andrew Schelling)

Lalleshwari's Legacy

About two hundred in number, her didactic quatrains showcase her poetic genius. Now they are an intrinsic part of the folk tradition of the region. It is said, "Lalla is to Kashmiris what Shakespeare is to the English."

Lal Ded's compositions were mainly passed down in the oral tradition. The *vakhs* were written down only after her death. Lately, they have gained enormous popularity worldwide, with her poems translated into English by modern scholars. Some well-known books by US-based authors include Jane Hirshfield's 'Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women', Coleman Barks' 'Naked Song: Lalla', and Jaishree Kak's 'Mystical Verses of Lalla'.

Other performative arts based on Lalleshwari are contemporary renditions of her poetry in song. Meanwhile, a solo play in English, Hindi, and Kashmiri titled 'Lal Ded' has been doing the rounds since 2004. It is directed and performed by noted actress Meeta Vashisht.

Despite being steeped in traditions of the day, Lal Ded was secular and tolerant. As a rebel, she chronicled the social evils of her time and raised people's awareness. She defined her relationship with God in universal terms, viewing everything as emanating from a single, unified reality. She was the only woman Kashmiri saint in the lineage of Trika Shaivism. Her poems revived the dying tradition. She was also the only woman Kashmiri saint to embrace Shaivism and Sufism. Her Shaivite-Sufi lineage has made her a beloved figure among both Hindus and Muslims. Scholars see her as a historical bridge between the two communities. According to author and poet Ranjit Hoskote: "To the outer world, Lal Ded is arguably Kashmir's best-known spiritual and literary figure; within Kashmir, she has been venerated both by Hindus and Muslims."

An extract from 'India's Spiritual Heroines' by Nandini Kapadia is published with permission from the book publisher, Motilal

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About the book:

'India's Spiritual Heroines' by Nandini Kapadia is an anthology of the biographies of 33 female sages, saints, mystics, and ascetics from India's history, spanning from the Vedic period to the 21st century. She aims to honor and preserve the legacy of these women, whom she considers "spiritual heroines" for their courage and outstanding achievements in overcoming societal disadvantages to follow their calling.

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Videos

Documentary on Mata Yogini Lalleshwari (28 min):

https://youtu.be/0-qhNR_02s0?si=40VO8At84hbw4eo9

Lal Ded (Lalleshwari) …14th century Saint, poet of Kashmir (5 min):

https://youtu.be/20897mAQ6ug?si=ZBs9kYYN05OcavDI

Lal Ded…mystic poetess of Kashmir (20 min):

https://youtu.be/i-WDEG2ts6c?si=LHpcejRliRuIZPCH

Who is Lal Ded ..mystic poetess of Kashmir (1 hr 05 min):

https://youtu.be/Ck1aW4tjQmE?si=xPP10jb5kw2jOXBx

Lal Ded…character, contribution and controversy ..discussion(1 hr 15 min):

https://youtu.be/bekgLD-3mxA?si=oMnOsC0egeo8Y_eQ

Introduction to Lalleshwari (33 min):

https://youtu.be/rkeSzW4CBks?si=7ZkSOpLsayktGTDp

Story of 14 th century mystic..Lal Ded of Kashmir (4 min):

https://youtu.be/jaOZjVkYkfk?si=5IIRDsMgWSybI292

Lalleshwari…yogini of Kashmir (20 min):

https://youtu.be/QVZa3dWF7bA?si=mKlQj2Ko71pBoIcZ

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About the Author

Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar is a Mechanical Engineer with specialization in Cryogenics. He obtained his B. E. In Mechanical Engineering from Karnataka Regional Engg College, (Now NITK), Surathkal, India and M.Sc. in Cryogenics from the University of Southampton, U.K., and Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

He has worked in prestigious organizations such as BARC, Bombay and Centre for Advanced Technology (CAT), Indore,as Head of Cryogenics Dept and contributed to the design of cryogenic systems, including the Thermovac chamber for ISRO, Bangalore.

He was also a visiting fellow at Superconducting Super Collider Project, at Texas, USA.

He has also served as Professor, Head of Department, and Principal in reputed engineering institutions.

Dr. Thirumaleshwar has authored a large number of FREE ebooks on Engineering subjects such as Thermodynamics, Heat Transfer, and Cryogenic Engineering, which are useful for students and teachers.

Driven by a deep interest in India's spiritual heritage, he has also authored many FREE ebooks on Temples, Saints, Gurus, and Vedic topics, with the aim of preserving and spreading this knowledge to future generations.

All his ebooks are available for free download at Archive.org.

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Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar
April 16, 2026

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